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ABSTRACT

This training manual explains the process of rating client openness from a short sample of dyadic help-intended interactions. The overview of client openness includes a discussion of the 10-week undergraduate program which teaches students to assess client openness based on behavioral ratings from the Group Assessment of Interpersonal Traits (GAIT). The GAIT procedure, in which each person spends five minutes in a client role and five minutes in a helping role, is described in depth. The manual considers the theoretical basis of the GAIT scale in relation to the intimacy of the discussion topic, the importance of the self-disclosure, and the individual's level of experiencing. The prediction of therapeutic talent from the helper-as-client's level of openness is discussed. Finally, the training technique and the rating procedure are described in detail, including many ratings examples to define scale points. (Author/NRB)

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RATING OPENNESS:

A TRAINING MANUAL

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

A Manual for Rating Openness

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1. OVERVIEW

a) The Openness Construct

The dimension of openness refers to the extent to which an individual's self-disclosure is intimate, the extent to which it is important, and to the individual's level of experiencing. The level of intimacy of the disclosure is the extent to which it is risky to reveal compared with other topics. The level of topic importance is judged by the intensity of expressed emotions using the quality of feeling statements and the urgency and distress in the voice. The level of inner experiencing is the extent to which the discloser focuses on their inner experiences, internal thoughts and feelings rather than focusing on external events and other people. At the low level of openness, one is remote from personal feelings, reactions or personal meanings. Moving up the scale, one is more in touch with one's feelings, is more able to risk sharing more personal matters, is exploring, and tries to understand the meaning of one's inner experiences.

b) The GAIT Procedure

Openness is one of the important dimensions of the GAIT scale. Other dimensions of the GAIT scale are empathy and acceptance-warmth. The GAIT (Group Assessment of Interpersonal Traits) refers to a method of assessing helping skills from a short segment of help-intended interaction. Briefly, each member of a small group takes turn to be either an "understander" or a "discloser" in a five minute dyadic

interchange in which a personal concern is discussed. Each participant, then, rates the others on constructs of warmth-acceptance and empathy (while in the role of understander), and on openness (while in the role of discloser).

c) The Training Process

The training program consisted of 10 weeks in which four undergraduate students and a researcher met four hours each week to listen to GAIT tape recordings, reviewing and discussing literature on client-centered therapy and trying to develop an openness scale under the guidance and direction of the researcher. After listening to a series of disclosures each week, the raters discussed the reasons for rating and the meaning of intimacy, topic importance, and different levels of experiencing. After developing an openness scale and coming to an agreement as to the meaning of each level of scale, another 10 weeks was spent rating 200 GAIT tape segments, comparing rating and examining the discrepancies and checking reliability within and between the raters.

2. THEORY AND BACKGROUND

a) Openness, self-disclosure and the experiencing scale

Auld (1968) defines openness as "the capacity to experience one's subjective states fully and freely--to have concrete images, emotions, and impulses without constraint or inhibition." According to Gendlin, Beebe, Cassans, Klein & Oberlander (1968), self-disclosure in the form of a patient's cognitive reports, explanations, and descriptions of external situations, is not sufficient for a psychotherapy treatment process to be successful. This is generally done in an "intellectualizing" and "externalizing" mode. An "experiential" type of communication is essential for progress. "Feeling" is an integral part of experiencing and a mechanism of personality and behavior change. "Feeling" does not refer to the client's talking about feelings, but to a continuous process in which the patient focuses on emotions being aroused in him at the moment in an interview situation. In sum, we find that experiencing is not only part of the definition of openness, but it is also essential in self-disclosure. Wilkinson & Auld (1975) cite Gendlin's experiencing scale (Gendlin & Tomlinson, 1960) which has been used in studies to find the role which experiencing plays in the behavior of the patient in client-centered therapy. It was found that experiencing was characteristic of the clients who eventually succeeded in psychotherapy. However, this was not so for the clients who did not improve. Clients who began therapy in a very intellectualized or externalized

manner did not develop a more experiential mode of behavior during the course of treatment.(Kiesler, Klein & Mathiew, 1965 as cited by Wilkinson & Auld, 1975). If the client's lack of "experiencing" does not change in the course of therapy, and if effective client-centered therapy includes a constant level of experiential involvement, then therapy success could be predicted by the degree of the client's ability to experience, which in turn is a function of openness.

b) The prediction of therapeutic talent

The measure of openness has been used to assess and predict helping skills in combination with measures of empathy and warmth-acceptance. This assessment has been made in a standardized situation known as the GAIT, the Group Assessment of Interpersonal Traits, which produces a short segment of help-intended interaction. Briefly, a small group meets and each person takes turns to be either an "understander" or a "discloser" in a five-minute interchange designed as a psychotherapy analogue. The discloser discusses a personal concern and the understander helps him or her explore this concern. Each person has a turn in each role and ratings are made on each other by the participants or the session is recorded to be rated later by trained observers. This manual addresses the latter procedure, in which trained raters made judgements of warmth-acceptance and empathy (for people while in the understander role), and of openness (while in the discloser

role). The GAIT was used originally for selecting talented non-professional counselors but has since shown evidence of its use as a measure of psychotherapeutic skill in a variety of contexts. The most impressive findings have been of its ability to predict not only concurrent measures of therapeutic skill, but also measures of the effect of this skill on clients. D'Augelli and Danish (1973) have called these two types of prediction "proximal evaluation" and "distal evaluation."

The model used for selecting criteria of therapeutic talent is that of client-centered theory. The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change formulated by Rogers (1957) can be seen in everyday behavior: the understanding ear of the good listener; the person who is accepting and non-judgemental; the person who is frank, honest, open, and self-disclosing. Some people possess all three traits. The GAIT aims to assess these traits individually and combine them in a composite score of "therapeutic talent" (Goodman, 1972).

The reliability of this composite therapeutic talent score has been shown to be acceptable. In eight studies reporting the use of trained GAIT raters, the median inter-rater reliability for the therapeutic talent score was .58, ranging from .50 to .73. (Shiffman, 1979) Also, Dooley (1975a) reports test-retest reliability of .73 for GAIT scores obtained 3 weeks apart.

Validity has been examined in terms of both proximal and distal criteria. Some studies have examined the

correlation between GAIT scores and counseling behavior. D'Augelli (1973), for example, demonstrated that therapeutic talent scores predicted interpersonal behavior in a two-hour encounter group. Those with high scores on empathy, warmth, and openness were rated by encounter group members as more empathically understanding, more warm and accepting, more frank and open, and more likely to discuss intimate topics. Other studies (e.g. Witlin, 1974; Dooley, 1975b) showed that the effects of training in limited counseling skills could be assessed by the GAIT.

Some studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between people's scores of empathy, warmth, and openness obtained on the GAIT and the improvement of their clients. For example, Rappaport, Chinsky, and Cowen (1971) assessed college students using the GAIT who led groups of chronic schizophrenics in a hospital. It was found that the GAIT scores of the college students predicted improvement in the patients, and that other standardized measures were unable to do so. Another study by Goodman (1972) which paired troubled boys with college students, was able to predict improvement in the boys' adjustment from the college students' GAIT scores with a moderate degree of success. Both of these studies show how ratings of a five-minute segment of helping behavior was able to predict later client improvement. Thus, openness in combination with warmth and empathy ratings predicts helping skill.

3. THE TRAINING PROCESS

The training procedure consisted of an introduction of the openness scale to the potential raters who were to be rating the 200 tape segments after the completion of the training. The initial training consisted of listening to an instructional tape (the GAIT rating tape, The "GRATE": Goodman, 1975) on the levels of intimacy and importance of the disclosers' topic, focusing on the criterion which differentiates an open discloser from one who is distant from his experiences. The initial training also involved some reading and discussion of psychotherapy process in general including two of Rogers' articles and film samples of Rogers' and Fritz Perls' therapy style. The purpose of the training procedure was to help the potential raters to come to an understanding of the meaning of each stage and application of openness scale to GAIT tapes which were to be used for the research.

The group and the researcher met two hours, twice per week where they listened to GAIT tape segments of dyadic interactions for 10 weeks.

In developing the openness scale, the researcher tried to establish clear and precise definitions for each stage of the scale and to encompass a wide range of disclosures. Each rater rated the segments independently, outside of group, using the primary scale which was related to Gendlin's experiencing scale. As a result of group discussions on discrepant ratings and the clarification of the meaning of each criterion, definitions of the content

and the process for each stage developed. This scale was further refined after sessions of analysing and delving into the meaning of each definition of different levels and trying those criterion to each tape segments and to develop a similar approach to listening and a similar frame of reference. Another 10 weeks after the initial 10 week training was spent rating 200- 5 minute GAIT tape segments, 24 segments per week. These tapes were listened and rated by the raters independently, and those with discrepant ratings (discrepancy of 1.5 or over) were listened to in the group. The reason for discrepant ratings were discussed by the raters and an effort was made to come to an understanding of the meaning of each point in the scale. Each week the reliability between and within the raters was computed and recorded. A reliability of .80 was obtained by the end of the training. The reason for meeting each week was to avoid raters' drift.

In the process of training and rating the raters encountered difficulties and questions which may be of interest to future raters.

Rating openness is not an easy skill to learn. However, if the trainees follow the procedures carefully, they can learn to use the scale properly and consistently. This is not to say that the raters are immune from what is called raters' drift. In all observational ratings the raters do tend to drift apart in their judgements at some point due to lack of contact while rating. Therefore it is essential for the raters to meet weekly to compare the

data and discuss the reason for their rating in order to avoid the "raters' drift."

It is easy to be influenced by the initial statement in judging the discloser's openness. When deciding on the level of topic intimacy and topic importance, the rater should look at the whole content rather than deciding the level on the basis of the discloser's opening statement.

It was noted that in spite of having a clear and definite reason for each rating, it is likely that the rater will encounter situations which have not been provided for in the stage definitions. When a segment raises issues that are not dealt with in the scale definitions, the rater has to rely on his/her general understanding of the scale and should have a definite rationale for his/her decision.

It appears that certain topics and certain types of disclosures seem especially intimate and important to some raters and not important to others depending on their gender. It is possible that sex differences in perception as result of socialization and subjectivity will bias the raters' rating. These issues need to be discussed and dealt with in the group.

It is essential that the rater makes a conscious effort <u>not</u> to base his/her rating on the feeling that she or he may have about the importance of a disclosed topic. The focus should be on the expression of feelings by and their importance to each discloser rather than judging the importance subjectively.

It is natural to have positive or negative reactions to certain disclosers, kinds of conversations, or content areas. The rater must be careful not to let his/her feelings about the person or his problems interfere with his judgement on the disclosers' level of openness.

4. THE RATING PROCESS

Rating disclosers according to the prescribed GAIT Openness Scale could potentially be a very cumbersome task, confronting the rater with the dilemma of performing subjective task with objectivity. Raters are forced to make inferences about others' sincerity and other intangible attributes. By having some very concrete objectives, and specific guidelines, however, this subjectivity is greatly reduced, and the rater can approach the task in a scientific manner.

TOPIC INTIMACY -	TOPIC IMPORTANCE
HI: THINGS USUALLY NOT DISCUSSED WITH MANY, IF ANY, PEOPLE.	HI: TOPIC DISCUSSED WITH STRONG AND IMMEDIATE FEELINGS.
MED: THINGS USUALLY DISCUSSED WITH FRIENDS BUT NOT CASUAL ACQUAINTANCES.	MED: TOPIC DISCUSSED WITH MODERATE INTENSITY OR FEELING.
LOW: TOPIC OFTEN DISCUSSED WITH ANYBODY - EVEN STRANGERS.	LOW: TOPIC DISCUSSED WITH A LACK OF FEELING AND WITHOUT URGENCY.

Table A

Table B

Combining Int. & Imp.Ratings

High High Med High	More Open
High Low Med Med	Mod. Open
Med Low Low Low	More Private

The Scale--Before examining the components of the rating procedure, it would be beneficial to give an overview of how the scale operates. The first part of the scale involves two boxes: topic intimacy, and topic importance (Note Table A above). The first thing the rater should do is determine whether a given discloser is high, medium,

or low in each of these two areas. The rater should circle his or her choice in each box. These two areas do not have any direct correspondence with each other; in other words, any combination can appear, such as med-med in Table A. Depending on the outcome of topic intimacy and importance, the rating automatically falls into one of three boxes (see Table B): more private, moderately open, and more open. For example, the med-med outcome in Table A places the rating in the mod open box as directed by the information in Table B.

	MORE PRIVATE		MODERATELY OPEN		MORE OPEN	
FEELINGS	• FEW PERSONAL FEELINGS SHARED		• SOME PERSONAL FEELINGS SHARED		• DEEPER FEELINGS REVEALED	
INTIMACY	• TALKED MOSTLY ABOUT EXTERNAL IMPERSONAL THINGS		• FAIRLY INTIMATE TALK		• RISKED SHARING MORE PERSONAL MATTERS	
FOCUS	• FOCUS ON OTHER PEOPLE		• FOCUS MORE ON SELF		• FOCUS PRIMARILY ON SELF	
GENERALITY	• GENERAL IDEAS ABSTRACTIONS		• SOME DIRECT PRIVATE MATTERS & SOME GENERAL PUBLIC IDEAS		• SPOKE IN SPECIFIC TERMS	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	MOSTLY PRIVATE	SLIGHTLY Open	SOMEWHAT Open	QUITE Open	VERY Open	EXTREMELY Open

Table C

The second part of this scale involves making a decision between two numbers within one of the three boxes: more private, moderately open, or more open (note Table C). Each box has two numbers, beginning with the lowest possible rating of 1 in the private box and ending with the highest possible rating of 6 in the more open box. For example, if the discloser who elicited a med-med in Table A also happened to have a high inner focus, and talked

in specific terms (these will be discussed further), he would deserve the higher of the two possible ratings in the moderately open box--hence, a final rating of 4. A .5 may be used for a rating that falls between two numbers.

Intimacy--The first assessment that the rater must make is how intimate is the topic that the discloser is revealing. One should not make the mistake of only listening to the discloser's opening statement. It is possible to have an insidiously open opening statement that never gets discussed with openness of feelings; conversely, it is possible for a discloser to address his or her disclosure with non-intimate words, and to then pick up in emotional content as the disclosure progresses.

What exactly, however, is intimacy? It is a construct that is not simple to measure. One rather simple way to think about intimacy, however, is to envisage the discloser at a party. If he or she is discussing a topic that easily could assimilate into any group of minglers, then it is probably low in intimacy. Such a topic would be one that does not involve personal risk--the risk of revealing one's weaknesses and vulnerabilities. One might disclose, for example, that one is bored and frustrated with one's work. This disclosure can be ubiquitously expressed; because the discloser has not revealed a personal "soft spot," he or she could address this to anybody in any situation at the party.

A topic medium in intimacy, on the other hand, would be one involving some risk. The problem would concern something inherent in the discloser's personality, as opposed to a situation-specific problem. The only way this kind of disclosure could assimilate into a party would be if the discloser met a specific individual with whom, after a lengthy, unsuperficial conversation, he or she felt close. An example of such a medium-intimacy disclosure is: "I have overanxious tendencies in a group situation."

A high in intimacy disclosure would very rarely be expressed at a party at all. It involves much risk and exposure of vulnerability on the part of the discloser, and might not readily be shared with anyone, no matter how close (refer to Table A for a briefer summary of intimacy criteria). An example of this high-level of intimacy is: "I'm having marital problems and I'm deeply depressed."

The metaphor of the party is used only to show how intimacy is measured primarily in relationship to social norms. A low-intimacy disclosure is very commonly expressed in a given social situation--a party, while a high-intimacy disclosure is rarely discussed. It is therefore, a function of social sanctions. Jourard has done some very interesting work on disclosures taken from this perspective.

Importance--Once an initial assessment is made as to how intimate a topic is, the rater must then decide how important this topic is to the discloser. One might flippantly

and evasively talk about an ostensibly intimate subject. So too, a seemingly trivial or mundane subject might be discussed with passion and immediacy (it is, therefore, entirely possible to have a low intimacy and high importance rating or vice versa). Determining topic importance demands a certain amount of insight. The rater must focus on the discloser's tone, but with the prowess of discerning between such delicate differences as verbal velocity as a result of anxiety and verbal velocity as simply the garrulous style of the discloser. Inferences must be made on the immediacy of the problem: is she really discussing something intensely, revealing her here-and-now need to gain insight into her problem--or--is she simply enjoying hearing herself talk with no real urgent concern or attachment to this problem? Topic importance does not lend itself to a metaphor as does intimacy; rather, it must be thought of as a continuum with High importance reflecting strong and immediate feelings, and low importance reflecting a lack of passion and urgency (refer to Table A for a summary of importance criteria).

Complications--There are two styles of disclosures that are not infrequent that tend to obscure the level of openness of the discloser. These attributes are intellectualization and lack of assuming responsibility. Being intellectual, as defined by dealing with a topic both cerebrally, and defensively is mutually exclusive with high openness, for openness manifests itself in genuiness and vulnerability--attributes of which the purely intellectual discloser does

not partake. He or she is, therefore, rated lower. Similarly, when an individual does not assume the responsibility for his or her problem, he or she also deserves a lower rating.

The Final Rating--At this point, the rater should know if his or her rating is in the more private, moderately open, or more open box. There are now some set criteria that help the rater make an intra-box decision--which of the two possible numbers with a given box (refer to Table C). These criteria are feelings, intimacy, focus, and generality. The rater decides how many deep feelings, if any, were disclosed; how personal was the content, ranging from impersonal, external events to risky, internal concerns; where is the focus--mostly on others indicative of distance from one's feelings--or primarily on self--a higher-level disclosure; how general and abstract versus how specific.

Like all facets of this scale, complications arise. For example, specificity is equated with a high-level of openness. Usually the more abstract the discloser is, the more distance he or she has from his or her feelings; sometimes, however, a discloser might be using specificity to evade feelings--this rating should be just as low as that of the abstractor.

Focus presents yet another complication. The typical low-level of disclosure would have a focus on other people. By the very nature of the assignment, however, the disclosers are never going to be focusing exclusively on other people--

they were asked to talk about themselves.

These kinds of complications are a signal for the rater to call upon his or her good judgement. Deciding if the final rating is a 3 or a 4, for example, represents the most subjective part of the task. Ideally, at this point, the rater knows how to tune into subtle qualitative differences that call for a higher or a lower rating. It is not, then, a mere "gut-feeling," but rather, an intelligent assessment that becomes more refined with practice. A good question to ask oneself, after coming up with a final rating is: does the subheading under my rating match my number--is the discloser for whom I rated a 4--"quite open?"

Concluding Comments--Though it is undebatable that the understander helps to foster the degree of openness of the discloser, for scientific purposes, it is important to ignore the implications of the interaction, and focus exclusively on the discloser.

The final rating, in conclusion, if it is a good one, will have measured, for the most part, topic intimacy, topic importance, and the inner focus of the discloser. The rating, moreover, will be a product of the rater's having integrated his or her acquired skill and resources, with the preconceived guidelines of the GAIT Openness Scale.

5. EXAMPLES

As discussed in the previous section, openness is a function of the topic intimacy, topic importance, and inner experiencing of the discloser. Topic intimacy is a measure of openness based on the content of the discloser's speech. It is in part a measure of the extent to which the discloser opens up about himself, exposing his strengths, weaknesses, and fears.

High topic intimacy is judged when the discloser talks about aspects of himself not normally shared with just anybody, and exhibits a degree of vulnerability and risk-taking. As seen from the openness scale, a high topic intimacy rating is given to those talks not usually discussed with many, if any people, and usually expose the soft spots and weaknesses of the discloser. Such an example of a high topic intimacy rating would be one discloser who stated "It's scary to need others, cause they may not be there." This discloser is exposing vulnerability in himself, stating his need for others and his fear of reaching out and not having someone there, and its something not likely to be shared with just anyone. Another example of a high intimacy statement is "It (my physical appearance) starts to bother me," as it reveals a dissatisfaction with the self, exhibiting a soft spot.

Medium topic intimacy is a rating given to those things that are usually discussed with friends, but not necessarily with casual acquaintances. It is somewhat risky, exposing a bit of the self, but to a lesser degree.

An example of a medium topic intimacy statement would be "I feel kind of awkward (in group situations). I don't like to be that way." This is medium intimacy because the person is indeed exposing some aspect of himself to others, but not to the extent that the person is taking great risk in making the statement. Another example is "I feel I'm too quick to anger about various things, and too slow to forgive." This statement is one that involves some risk taking, as it signifies some desire to change, yet does not leave the discloser vulnerable and weak, and hence could be spoken to friends and is given a medium rating.

A low intimate topic rating are about things often discussed with anybody, including strangers and casual acquaintances. It is usually about things that are impersonal, sometimes public ideas. Such an example would be "I don't know what party to pick when I reregister to vote." This is a topic which may be discussed with anybody, as it involves no risk on the part of the discloser. Another example of a low intimacy disclosure is "I'm an extremely unorganized person." This statement again does not involve risk on the discloser's part, and is also an aspect of the person's outward behavior, something likely to be discussed with anybody.

Topic importance, another aspect of the openness scale, is defined as how the discloser talks about his topic. It is the measure of the extent to which the discloser puts feelings and emotional involvement into what

he's talking about. If the topic is important to the discloser, that will manifest itself at the feeling level. This is a somewhat subjective measure, as often the only indication of high importance are such things as tone of voice, slowness of speech, or loudness of voice. Other times, the discloser will say the topic is important to him.

High topic importance is one spoken with strong and immediate feelings, it is a subject spoken with high personal investment on the part of the discloser indicating its importance. An example of a high topic importance statement is, "I'm afraid to take chances. It's difficult to be honest with feelings like that." This statement shows high importance to the discloser, with strong feelings attached to it, and the experiencing of them at the moment. This is also manifested in the statement, "I'm experiencing a lot of anxiety," where the discloser states the importance of the topic through how they're feeling at the moment. Again, however, high topic importance can be judged solely by the process of the discloser's speech, exhibiting strong and immediate feelings through the tone, speed, or loudness of the voice.

Medium topic importance is given to a topic discussed with moderate intensity or feeling. It is a subject spoken with no urgency, but one that is somewhat important, with no strong feelings but nevertheless some feeling involved. An example of this is "I'm feeling a bit uncomfortable." This statement shows some feeling of uneasiness, but does

not have the urgency necessary to be a high rating. Another example of a medium topic importance from a discloser is the statement, "I think it is important to me." This is a case where the discloser says it's not an urgent topic, and it is spoken without strong and immediate feelings, yet is not totally devoid of feelings.

The low level of topic importance is one discussed with a lack of feeling and without urgency. It is generally one that is unimportant to the discloser, and hence the subject is usually not treated with much seriousness on the part of the discloser. Two examples of statements spoken with low importance would be "It's not something I wish to correct," and "I'm missing out on certain people, I suppose." Both statements display a lack of interest on the discloser's part. There is a bit of apathy in the statements, hence the low importance ratings. Another example is the statement "I'm not interested in looking for my fears." This statement, again, is spoken without feeling and urgency, and was rated low on importance.

The third aspect of a discloser's openness is the extent to which the inner experience of the discloser is revealed. This is measured on four variables: feelings, intimacy, focus, and generality. An example of a statement at the high end of inner experiencing is "There's a feeling of vulnerability and fear of being hurt by relating to others and making myself too vulnerable." This statement reveals deeper feelings, personal matters being risked by the discloser, a focus primarily on the self, and

specificity about the self. Two more examples of such a disclosure is "I want to be sure I'm not putting myself second, not asserting myself, getting my needs met," and "I feel more vulnerable, the prospect of a close intimate relationship scares me." These statements both express deep and risky feelings, and are spoken specifically and centered on the self, and are thus at the high end of inner experience.

The middle level of inner experience, moderately open, are those talks with lesser amounts on the four variables. An example would be the statement "It makes me feel more pressured." This is moderately open, because the discloser is revealing some personal feelings of a fairly intimate nature, yet not exposing a lot of vulnerability. The statement is focused somewhat on the self with a little less specificity as exhibited by the word "pressured," a somewhat general term. Another example is the statement, "It'd bother me that I couldn't tell her anything," which doesn't exhibit the deep revealing feelings of a high focus statement, yet shows some feelings.

Lower inner experience is given to those topics spoken of with little personal feelings, general, external, and with a major focus on others rather than on the self. An example of such a disclosure is "Its a pretty interesting paradox." This is low on inner experience because of its lack of feelings expressed, its external and not very intimate, the focus is not on the self by use of the word "It's," and it's not a specific private subject. Two

more examples are, "It's strange to be in a situation of a group without talking," and "It tends to make one draw back." Both of these statements exhibit the same externalization of feelings, the same aloofness from the self, both using the word "It" as opposed to "I," indicating a detachment from the self.

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